

# Review

MARTIN T. DINTER and CHARLES GUÉRIN (EDS), *CULTURAL MEMORY IN REPUBLICAN AND AUGUSTAN ROME*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023. Pp. xvi + 475, illus. ISBN 9781009327756. £115.00.

In the introduction to this volume, the result of two symposia, the editors optimistically declare ‘cultural memory studies’ to be an ‘emerging wave’ in classical research (1). They are, of course, aware that this approach, conceptually based on the work of M. Halbwachs, J. and A. Assmann, P. Nora and the handbook by Erll and Nünning, already has a rather long beard in Classics as well; it is rightly referred to as ‘the current *Zeitgeist* of cultural memory studies’ (8). The research landscape on this and on the significance of media and medialisation in this context is now so densely populated that the relevant synthesis penned by the reviewer (*Memoria und res publica*, 2004) could easily be ignored by most of the contributions. Only a few of these twenty-one consistently interesting contributions can be discussed in a short review; thankfully, the editors themselves provide abstracts in the introduction (12–18).

Thomas Biggs uses a theoretically sophisticated conceptualisation from recent memory studies to display how Naevius was able to shape Roman memory of the first Carthaginian war with his epic *Bellum Punicum*. This makes perfect sense, as do the comments on the multimedia presence of memory in Rome. However, we know too little about the *BP* to be able to refer to it as ‘an epically mediated veteran’s tale’ (31). On the contrary, Biggs underestimates that an overall literary narrative always has the potential to eliminate individual, i.e. spatially and temporally limited, memories of war from the field, precisely because it can create a larger context and a link back to older history, something that even oral narratives handed down over generations cannot do. The extent to which literary forerunners are able to shape further historiographical processing can be seen in prose historiography, for example with regard to Fabius Pictor’s composition of the *ktisis* phase.

In her appreciation of Varro, Irene Leonardis goes beyond the common assessment of his antiquarian studies. Varro did not primarily give meaning back to the places, names and rituals of the Romans that had become unrecognisable and thus helped to overcome the ‘crisis of tradition’. Rather, he filled the gaps in lived practice with a rational construction, and thus expanded the concept of culture into the universal by modelling stages of development and genealogies of civilisation and bringing them together into a general concept of *humanitas* and human knowledge. By doing so, ‘Varro prepared the way for Augustus’ empire and now represents an essential step towards what has been termed the Roman Cultural Revolution’ (114). The extent to which cultural memory contributed to the formation of a Roman imperial identity is displayed by Bénédict Delignon using the example of the Temple of Apollo Palatinus erected by Augustus to commemorate the Battle of Actium. Ovid, Propertius, Virgil and Horace certainly supported the ideological significance of the building, and even attempts at subversive reinterpretation could not prevent the temple from becoming an obligatory place of remembrance.

Of course, the scope of the diverse, often playful recodings and bold parallelisations that the poets dared to undertake must remain open. Daria Šterbenc Erker illustrates this with a passage from Ovid’s *Fasti*, in which Servius Tullius and Augustus are seen together on the base of the Temple of Fortuna in the Forum Boarium: as descendants of gods and pious patrons, as occasionally comic figures and as actors in murderous family intrigues. Whether some of the poet’s words were meant critically or could be read as such by the audience is irrelevant as long as there were no forums and discourses that bundled such criticism and translated it into options for action — this aporia of the venerable Two Voices Theory cannot be resolved.

Taking Sulla’s dictatorship as her starting point, Alexandra Eckert devotes herself to the formula *rem publicam constituere*. Unlike Eckert, I am certain that Augustus considered not only the dictatorship abolished in 44 B.C. but also this formula obsolete. In *RGDA* 7, the power as *triumvir r. p. constituendae* is strikingly qualified by its limitation to ten years and thus differentiated from the continuously held dignity as *princeps senatus*, and in Tac., *Ann.* 1.9, the wording *principis nomine constituta res publica* is undoubtedly to be read as an element of criticism of the monarchy and not as evidence ‘that Augustus had indeed successfully utilized the legitimising effects of *rem publicam constituere* as part of Roman cultural memory’ (180). Cultural

memory is not just a continuum or a giant vacuum cleaner; sometimes what no longer fits is also discarded. The editors rightly note in connection with the — admittedly particularly contested — memory of Marcus Brutus (on this, Kathryn Tempest, ‘Remembering M. Brutus: From Mixed and Hostile Perspectives’, 218–38), ‘that memory is not an unchanging legacy but rather an open resource for making shared stories about the past’ (16).

Several contributions, including those by Catherine Steel (‘Cultural Memory and Political Change in the Public Speech of the Late Roman Republic’, 203–17) and Mark Thorne (on Cato Uticensis, 239–57), argue in favour of qualifying Assmann’s distinction between communicative and cultural memory and instead focusing on ‘the interface and overlap’ between the two. Correct, but hardly ground-breaking (*pace* the Introduction, 3). This overlooks once again that the ‘storage mode’ of memory (‘Speichergedächtnis’) emphasised by Assmann works for Ancient Egypt, but not for Roman (and Greek) antiquity, where many people had access to writing and literature and members of the aristocracy had the option of monumentalising memory, at least until the Principate (cf. Walter, *Memoria und res publica* (2004), 24–6). Thus, even Cicero used the term *popularis* depending on the context, which is not surprising given ‘the heterogenous set of factors an orator had to take into account when approaching a popular audience and asserting an ideological claim upon their cultural memory’ (Evan Jewell, 198).

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doi:10.1017/S0075435824000029

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Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of The Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies.